



(U) InSIDer's View of History: Testifying Before Congress... Who Turned Out the Lights?

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(U//FOUO) When I was asked to contribute a story from my career for this SID *today* series, the incidents I remembered the best were the ones that were rather comical! One that immediately sprang to mind took place in 1986, when I was NSA's SINIO for Strategic Programs & Arms Control.

(U//FOUO) At the time, the U.S. and Soviets had negotiated the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty, which was groundbreaking in that it was the first treaty to bring about the complete elimination of an entire class of nuclear weapons, and the first-ever agreement which would permit "on-site inspectors" from each country to monitor the other country's compliance. This treaty was highly controversial and deemed extremely important by the Reagan Administration; consequently the oversight for support in stewarding this treaty through the legislative process was extremely tight... nothing would be left to chance and all efforts would be carefully orchestrated.

(U//FOUO) Congressional approval was expected to be a significant challenge and the Intelligence Community had the charge of ensuring that compliance could indeed be verified. To assist them in their deliberations leading to a vote on ratification, Congress called for closed-door hearings with the heads of the Intelligence Agencies. The NSA Director, LTG Odom, was summoned, along with the heads of DIA (Lt Gen Perroots), INR (Ambassador Abramowitz), and the DCIA (Judge Webster). General Odom, never one to conform when he had a better idea, made it known that he didn't want to testify, and informed Ralph Adams, NSA's Legislative Affairs Chief, that the SINIO for Strategic Programs & Arms Control (that was me) would go in his place. To make this relatively low-ranking bureaucrat acceptable for this forum, the ever-resourceful Mr. Adams decided that I should be given an important-sounding title, and I was subsequently dubbed the "NSA Director for Arms Control."

(U//FOUO) It was my job to draft the NSA testimony that would focus in great detail on our ability to monitor compliance with the provisions of the treaty. It was a lengthy and complex statement and when it was done, it was also my job to coordinate and gain approval not only within NSA, but also from the Secretary of Defense. Once I completed the NSA coordination gauntlet I took it to the Pentagon for Secretary Weinberger's approval. I never actually met him, but did cool my heels in his outer office for an extended period of time while he presumably read and approved every detail of the text.

(U//FOUO) When the day came to appear before the committee it actually turned out to be a joint session of the Senate Select



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Committee for Intelligence and the Senate Armed Forces Committee. I admit to being more than a little nervous - We entered the SSCI secure briefing room, which is aptly called the "Vault" and actually has a huge, bank style vault door and I was even more intimidated. Seated around the room were very famous people I had previously only seen on TV; including John Glenn, Dan Quayle, Sam Nunn, Bill Bradley, David Boren and William Cohen, among others. After I was shown to my seat at the table reserved for testimony, I introduced myself to a very pleasant man seated next to me who identified himself as Bill Webster (also known as the DCI Judge William Webster). After a short exchange of pleasantries and small talk, he introduced me to the other members of his "Team" - the Director of DIA and INR.

(U//FOUO) What happened next has almost nothing to do with the proceedings, but was very interesting and humorous. One of the "Team" who will remain unnamed, abruptly and somewhat urgently asked for his briefcase. The entire back row energized and very quickly there was a scuffling noise in the corner and a briefcase appeared, and it was passed hand-to-hand over people's heads until it reached the VIP Team member. I fully expected him to pull some highly sensitive papers out, but instead he took the briefcase placed it on the chair and sat on it, presumably to have a better view of the surroundings from a more lofty perch.

(U//FOUO) Next, the CIA Legislative Affairs Officer approached the witness table and announced that there had been a change of plan: Judge Webster would testify, and the rest of us would sit in the back row. When I conveyed the change of plans to the SSCI staff chief, a Mr. George Tenet, he said something like "over my dead body" and quickly put the kibosh on that idea and after a short discussion with the committee Chairman Senator Boren we were quickly back to the original format. As the hearing began, a number of people from NSA were watching the proceedings and observing this august gathering; the joke that dominated the home crowd was "We all recognize Charlie, but who are all those other guys?" Meanwhile, people elsewhere in the Intelligence Community were no doubt wondering who the unknown guy without curly hair was sitting with the three Directors.

(U//FOUO) Judge Webster was first to testify and he read his prepared text, which was rather long and some might say factual but dry. Then Chairman Boren announced that the NSA Director for Arms Control would speak. "That's me!" I remembered and as I was about to begin, he said, "Mr. Meals I understand you have some graphics to show us" (In those days NSA was rather famous for always using very polished and elaborate graphics with their presentations). He then instructed the staff to turn out the lights. It was pitch dark in the vault - so dark, in fact, that I couldn't see a word of my written testimony! What to do? I could ask them to turn on the lights... or I could wing it. I decided to wing it.

(U//FOUO) The graphics appeared on the screen, and as if by magic, words came out of my mouth describing the details behind what everyone was seeing. I spoke completely off the cuff and to my surprise, the Senators became very engaged and showed a great deal of interest in how SIGINT would play in all of this. After I finished the brief, there were a number of questions and comments and to be honest, I must admit my initial anxiety had disappeared and I was enjoying my "time on stage". While it appeared that my extemporaneous remarks were well received, it also occurred to me, that I might not have been totally precise in terms of the very specific testimony I had approved by Secretary Weinberger. It was

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at this point the cold sweat returned and I knew I could be in real hot water. Fortunately for me, George Tenet came up to congratulate me for presentation and I confided to him that I was only "paraphrasing" my testimony and the recording would not match what the SECDEF had approved. Coming to my rescue he told me to relax and that he would simply submit a copy of the written testimony for the record and I wouldn't get fired after all.

(U) I'm not sure that there's any real moral to this story, but I did learn one important lesson: never bring slides along when testifying before a closed session to Congress!

(U) ...and the rest of the story! The INF treaty *was* ratified, in no small part because of the high level of confidence in verification (i.e. intelligence). In the end this resulted in the destruction of an entire class of nuclear weapons systems that were perceived by both the Soviets and NATO as being extremely dangerous and a hair trigger in many respect - all in all a good ending.

(U//FOUO) See other editions of *InSIDer's View of History* :

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